



Studying Sculpture with Interactive Multimedia



Multimedia Sculpture at t

'Sculpture Interactive' is a state of the art multimedia production about 20th century British sculptors and their work.

Visitors to the Tate Gallery in Liverpool can 'view' pieces of sculpture from many perspectives and even in different lighting conditions. They can take a 'surrogate walk' around Henry Moore's studios at Much Hadham, as they were left at the time of his death and even rummage through the drawers, finding original sketches and drawings. Their interest aroused, they can then listen to a radio interview with Moore and his contemporaries and see video footage of his exhibition in Venice in 1976. They can finish up by viewing a photographic image of the 1976 exhibition poster and catalogue, before entering the main gallery to see his work 'in the flesh' - so to speak.

Ambitious Interactive Multimedia Project

Sculpture Interactive was devised by the Tate Gallery and Martin Wright, a senior producer at the BBC's Open University Production Centre at Milton Keynes, who has over seven years experience in educational interactive video production and produced the first interactive PAL videodisc.

According to Wright, the system performs two main functions. First, it provides a simple reference source of information about the works on display. Second, it offers users the chance to explore multimedia essays generated by art historians and contemporary artists.

Wright observes, "The installation represents a significant development in the use of multimedia technology, enabling experts who have no technical knowledge to produce well structured interactive multimedia 'essays'



for the general public, providing them with a greater insight into the works on display.

"It has been an ambitious project, particularly given the technology limitations we have had to deal with in the past. We originally developed Sculpture Interactive on another

system but, quite frankly, it was so complex and time consuming, not to mention the expense, that sometimes it looked like we would never be able to do what we wanted. Then we took a close look at the Apple™ Macintosh™ and HyperCard™ and were

The Tate Gallery Liverpool



The Next Best Thing to Having the Sculptor at Your Elbow

The core of the system is an extensive 'MediaBase Resource' comprising text, graphics, sound and images. Written material from a variety of sources is stored on the computer. On the accompanying videodisc is a selection of radio interviews with sculptors such as Epstein and Hepworth, along with archive footage covering subjects such as sculptors at work, casting processes and major exhibitions. Over 600 images of such items as books, posters, drawings and paintings are also included. But perhaps the most exciting part of the 'MediaBase Resource' is the surrogate object facility. This consists of over 3000 images which represent 200 sculptures that can be explored under full control of the users. "The system provides the next best thing to having the object in front of you, with the sculptor at your elbow explaining it to you," comments Richard Francis, curator at the Tate Liverpool. "By touching navigation arrows that are presented on the Apple Macintosh screen, you can turn most pieces, zoom in on the details and in some cases, even see the lighting changed by the artists or sculpture experts. This allows us to provide the public with perspectives of the sculpture that you can't get in the gallery."

Enhances and Extends the Experience of Sculpture

Rather than being a substitute for seeing the real thing, Francis believes the system enhances the visitors experience, and more importantly, extends the experience to people who are unable to visit the gallery. "While one system is located permanently here in the Tate Liverpool, we hope to see others used in schools, colleges and universities throughout

the U.K. and even abroad," adds Francis.

Collaborating on the project is Roy Stringer from Bit 32, an Apple Dealer and multimedia systems developer, who has been responsible for implementing the user interface and essaying environment.

Commenting on Sculpture Interactive Stringer said, "One important aim in developing the software has been to provide the power of multimedia production to the subject expert rather than technology specialist. But more important still, we have made it fully accessible to the general public which we believe is essential if interactive multimedia is to realise its full potential. Fortunately, our task was made immeasurably easier by the decision of the Tate and BBC to use the Apple Macintosh. The Apple Macintosh is equipped to handle text, graphics, images, animations and sound, and can easily control videodiscs. We had a range of excellent development tools from which to choose, and ended up using HyperCard for development and SuperCard™ for the final implementation. This meant that we could focus our development efforts on making the system as easy to use as possible for the public and the sculpture experts, rather than getting the basics to work".

Sculpture Interactive demonstrates the convergence of the once separate domains of broadcasting, computers and museums to provide multimedia facility of benefit to art historians, academics, students and the general public alike, by bringing diverse sources of information together, putting each in context and making them accessible to all.

amazed at what was possible. Not only were all the basic multimedia capabilities that we needed present on the system, but they were so easy to use that, for the first time, I myself could create the initial designs and prototypes without relying on expensive programmers."

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